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## V CORPS AMBULANCE COMPANY WELCOMED HOME FROM DEPLOYMENT IN IRAQ

By Sgt. Rosalyn Peterkin

30<sup>th</sup> Medical Brigade Public Affairs Office

**HEIDELBERG, Germany --** "This day has been hoped for, planned for, and prayed for—ladies and gentlemen, I am happy to report that 100 percent of the 557th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance) who deployed is home," exclaimed Lt. Col. Kyle Campbell, commander of the 557th's parent unit, V Corps' 421st Medical Evacuation Battalion.



SGT ROSALYN PETERKIN

Sgt. 1st Class Leonard Donaldson, first sergeant of V Corps' 557th Medical Company (Ground Ambulance), and guidon bearer Spc. Vilmaris Ortizsolivan, uncase the 557th's colors at a welcome-home ceremony at Wiesbaden (Germany) Army Airfield February 11, symbolizing the unit's safe return to Germany from its yearlong deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Campbell was speaking during a February 11 ceremony in Hangar 1036 at Wiesbaden Army Airfield that signifying the unit's official return from the second iteration of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Soldiers of the 557th said the ceremony marked the end of a yearlong deployment during which

they provided support to ground forces during and after major combat operations and established the unit as the preeminent ground ambulance company in the U.S. Army.

More than 100 Soldiers from the 557th arrived in Kuwait in January 2004 and immediately began preparations for their movement into Iraq. In less than a month, the unit split up to provide medical support in various locations, including the cities of Al Asad, Balad, and Tikrit. Throughout the deployment, the 557th supported missions for the U.S. combat support hospitals, fire stations, U.S. Marine expeditionary forces, naval medical units and infantry divisions.

A portion of the unit was tasked with providing medical support to all outlying forward operating bases in their area for Soldiers of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 1st and 25th Infantry Divisions; the 67th Combat Support Hospital, and the 167th Area Support Group, while others joined forces with the Marines. Soldiers of the 557th located at LSA Anaconda in Balad, Iraq had a mission that encompassed all ground evacuation in and out of the 31st Combat Support Hospital, including helipad operations and patient evacuations.

Capt. Matthew Curlee, the 557th commander, said the medical and tactical skills of the 557th Soldiers were put to the test on a daily basis during their deployment and that "they definitely proved themselves to be among the finest Soldiers in the Army."

"There is not a word adequate enough to express the amount of pride that I have for the men and women standing before you today," Curlee said during the ceremony.

"Every one of theses Soldiers are heroes -- it is their efforts, and the efforts of those

who came before them, that has allowed our nation to become the leader of the free world."

Unit officials say the 557th was the largest ground ambulance company to deploy in support of OIF II.

While conducting split-base operations, the unit's Soldiers also performed support missions such as command post duties; gun support; driving company convoys; food service duties and vehicle maintenance support for the company and the 429th Medical Battalion.

On several of their missions, Soldiers from the 557th were attacked during convoys; had vehicles that encountered improvised explosive devices and came under small arms fire.

Curlee said the performance of the unit's Soldiers said a lot about their dedication.

"No one who has not lived [through the dangers in Iraq] can ever fully comprehend the courage it takes to continue to execute [your mission] while in mortal danger. Yet these outstanding Americans were always there for each other, never hesitated and never faltered," the captain said. "They executed every mission and task above and beyond all expectations."

During their tour in Iraq, the 557th's Soldiers completed 3,127 missions, drove 184,209 miles, and transported more than 5,258 patients.

"The performance of the 557th was absolutely phenomenal," said Campbell. "They drove over 184,000 miles over the most hazardous road and combat conditions found in the entire theater and executed thousands of missions all without accident or incident. Their accomplishments are beyond amazing."

"They have touched thousands of lives on and off the battlefield and history will never forget their efforts, said Curlee. "I am grateful that I was allowed to serve with them."

Entering Iraq with a large number of Soldiers under his command who had come directly from Advanced Individual Training, Curlee credits the unit's success to "the deployment preparations, the leadership skills of outstanding NCOs, and the Soldiers' dedication to saving lives."

With everyone back safe and sound, Curlee said that now his main focus for the 557th is reintegration.

"A lot has changed while we were gone. My main goal now is to get Soldiers back with their families and back to training in a garrison environment."

The unit's welcome-home ceremony concluded with Curlee thanking the Soldiers, family members and friends of the 557th for their sacrifices during the unit's deployment.

